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SUBJECT: ROMANIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: FRONTRUNNER MIRCEA  
GEOANA - HEAVY ON FOREIGN POLICY EXPERIENCE BUT LITTLE  
SUBSTANCE

REF: BUCHAREST 787 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Mark H. Gitenstein, reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. This cable provides a first look at the potential foreign policy priorities of Mircea Geoana, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) candidate who, for the moment, could be poised to unseat incumbent President Traian Basescu. Septels will address Geoana's political background, and also his relationship with the PSD dealmakers and oligarchs who many expect would really pull the strings in a Geoana presidency and PSD-led Government of Romania. Geoana shares Basescu's emphasis on strong relationships with NATO and the U.S., but he clearly signals his desire for enhanced cooperation with the EU and improved relations with Russia. While the economic crisis and restrained budget could impact Romania's international military commitments were Geoana to win, major shifts in overall foreign policy are unlikely.  
END SUMMARY.

Foreign Policy NOT a Campaign Issue

12. (SBU) Geoana entered this presidential campaign with a wealth of foreign policy experience, having served as MFA spokesman 1993-1995, Ambassador to the U.S. 1996-2000 and Foreign Minister 2000-2004. However, he has not made foreign affairs a centerpiece of his campaign, preferring to attack Basescu on domestic and economic issues where he feels that the incumbent is weaker. Even on the few issues where he differed with Basescu, e.g., improving relations with Russia, Geoana has not highlighted these differences as a major campaign theme. More importantly perhaps, there is little interest in Foreign Affairs within the Romanian electorate. Voters are focused on personalities and on the "pocketbook factor" in the wake of the world financial crisis; Romania remains mired in the crisis.

His Own Best Counselor

13. (C) As a career diplomat, Geoana is extremely confident in his own foreign affairs acumen, shunning the advice of PSD foreign policy experts such as Euro MP (and frequent rival) Adrian Severin. Instead he named Oana Popescu, a relatively unknown former television personality, as his campaign Foreign Policy Advisor. This confidence has created a rift between Geoana and the traditional foreign policy power-players in the PSD. At the same time, Geoana's reliance on his own experience and refusal to elaborate a foreign policy platform make it difficult to identify his vision for Romania's role in the region or the wider world.

U.S. and NATO Relationships Paramount

14. (C) Geoana has not been involved actively in foreign policy in recent years, focusing more on protecting and

consolidating his leadership of PSD. However, based on public statements and his pre-2004 record, one can safely conclude that there are few differences between his approach to the world and President Basescu's. Both support a strong relationship with the U.S. and a commitment to NATO as the pillars of Romania's defense strategy. Geoana may not be as strongly committed to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan or as willing to continue in the face of future casualties, but he likely wagers a policy of continued Romanian involvement in NATO and U.S. out-of-area military engagement as a down payment on Article 5 support should Romania ever face attack.

Though Geoana, as Basescu, would welcome an increased U.S. presence on Romanian soil, whether in terms of the 2005 Defense Cooperation Agreement or deployment of new missile defense assets, but unlike Basescu, Geoana can be expected to assuage Moscow's angst in either case.

#### The Brussels and Moscow Factors

¶5. (C) Although personally and publicly supportive of "Strategic Partnership" with Washington, Geoana takes a more open approach than Basescu to Romania's engagement within the EU and with other EU member states. Where Basescu could almost certainly be counted on to support the U.S. in any serious disagreement with Brussels, Paris or Berlin, Geoana's position would likely be more nuanced. He sees Romania's future as inexorably tied to the rest of Europe and, whether from conviction or unwillingness to buck EU consensus, he would be less inclined to go it alone or side with the "like-minded minority" that often includes the UK, Netherlands, Denmark and Poland.

BUCHAREST 00000798 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) A greater mystery is Geoana's approach to Russia. He has criticized Basescu publicly for taking too hard a line with Moscow, arguing that the GOR should not allow foreign policy disputes in some areas to prevent a civil dialogue in others. Although Geoana faces public criticism over the revelation of two secret trips to Moscow in 2009, his campaign has not taken a sharp hit on the issue. The trip most recently revealed involved Geoana traveling to Moscow on oligarch Sorin Ovidiu Vantu's plane. As Foreign Minister, Geoana was always willing to talk to the Russians, but he also played a significant role in a number of U.S.-led NATO initiatives that angered Moscow, including NATO membership for the Baltic States and pressure on Moscow to meet its Istanbul commitments to withdraw its forces from Georgia and Moldova. However, while President Basescu has put high priority on helping the new government in Moldova to resist Russian pressure, Geoana seems to have a more "even-handed" approach and to consider the Moldova question open to negotiation - even with Moscow. An eventual Geoana presidency also poses a challenge for U.S. and European energy security policy, as he would almost certainly try to discontinue Basescu's advocacy for the Nabucco pipeline project in favor of the Russian-sponsored South Stream, in which a number of Geoana's oligarch backers have either direct or indirect interests.

#### Guns or Butter?

¶7. (C) While Geoana may maintain many of the existing GOR foreign policy priorities should he become president, the PSD party machine could force him to sacrifice defense expenditures in order to fund social welfare programs that are at the core of his party's platform. Given the GOR's tight budgetary constraints in the wake of the financial crisis, the winner of this election will face difficult fiscal decisions. A Geoana presidency would likely remain committed to the Romanian deployments in Afghanistan and Kosovo, but funding cuts and re-prioritization could affect Romanian military effectiveness and certainly their ability to increase troop contributions. If Geoana chose to cut military expenditures, delays in crucial training and equipment procurements will be inevitable. It is also

possible that a PSD-led government would delay the purchase of new fighter aircraft, or even reconsider the pending decision to go with the U.S. F-16 over the Swedish Grippen.

18. (C) COMMENT. Six days out from round two, Geoana seems poised to unseat Basescu, but Romanian voters are notoriously fickle and a Geoana blunder combined with a Basescu signature "fourth-quarter surge" could turn the tides quickly. In his October 22 meeting with the Vice President, Geoana stressed the importance of continuity in U.S.-Romanian relations regardless of who should win the presidential election. We have few indications that Geoana himself would want to make significant changes to GOR foreign policy, and indeed PSD had control of the Foreign Ministry from the November 2008 elections to the October 2009 collapse of the coalition government. However, PSD dealmakers such as Viorel Hrebienciuc, oligarchs such as Vantu and party old-timers such as former president Ion Iliescu are a different story. PSD is the direct successor to the former ruling Communist Party of Nicolae Ceausescu, and some senior party figures are less reconstructed than others. Should Geoana win, we will have to watch carefully who has his ear - whether officially or unofficially.  
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